

## The Goodwin Sands Education Project

### The Great Storm by Thomas Atkins, December 1703

My name is Thomas Atkins but my shipmates call me 'Tatters.' I think I'm the only sailor who has survived two shipwrecks in one night.

It seems strange but despite living and working on the sea, most of my fellow sailors can't swim. This is why they are now at the bottom of the sea whilst I am telling my story beside a blazing log fire in The Ship Inn in Deal.

I am 15 years old and until last month I was a seaman on the warship HMS *Mary* built during the reign of King Charles II. She was the most important ship in the fleet - called the flagship - because she carried the Admiral of the Fleet, Rear-Admiral Basil Beaumont. She was armed with 50 powerful cannons.



*Mary, Restoration and Stirling Castle* by Richard Endors

During the summer of 1703 we had been basking in the Mediterranean sun, chasing invaders off the shores of France. We were ordered back to England in the autumn which is when our problems began. Many sailors became sick during the long journey

home due to the poor quality and lack of food, so there were fewer sailors doing all the usual jobs. Those of us who were not sick were weak and exhausted.

Towards the end of November, the weather started to get worse - well it always does at that time of year, doesn't it? Together with three other warships, HMS' *Northumberland*, *Restoration* and *Stirling Castle* we hurried up the English Channel to take refuge in The Downs, the well-known anchorage lying between the infamous Goodwin Sands and Kent.



The Great Storm by Dr David Perkins

On the night of 26th - 27th November an enormous storm blew up - I've never experienced anything like it in my two years at sea. It was truly frightening. The noise of the wind howling in the rigging and of the waves crashing onto the Goodwin Sands was deafening. Ships were losing their masts all over the place, anchors were being dragged and all around us we could hear the awful shouts and screams from sailors whose ships were being smashed to pieces and sinking.



The *Mary* was being blown towards the Goodwin Sands and we could do nothing to stop it. Soon the huge waves overwhelmed her, she started to sink and all those sailors around me who couldn't swim began to drown. Close to us the *Stirling Castle* was also being pushed onto the dreadful Sands but she wasn't sinking, so I started to swim towards her - and somehow I made it!

Several pairs of hands reached over the side to pull me up and we all sat huddled together on the aft (back) deck as this was her highest point. Then followed the worst night of my life, clinging to the deck of a sinking warship whilst watching the twinkling lights of the Deal disappear in and out of the spray from the waves.



Rear-Admiral Basil Beaumont

Rescue boats could not be launched because the weather was so bad. It was cold, dark and extremely windy; we were tired and hungry; our clothes were in shreds and soaking wet. Even worse, we soon realized that the *Stirling Castle* was also sinking but the good Lord was obviously watching over us as the poop deck (the high deck at the back of the boat) remained above water for a long time. Despite this, I was surrounded by men dying from exposure and hypothermia and I was determined not to be one of them.

The next day, the storm had died down enough for boats to eventually be launched from Deal beach - you can't imagine my relief when I saw those heroic Deal boatmen coming towards us because by then I had been swept overboard and was only just managing to keep my head above the water.

Nearly 70 sailors were rescued from the *Stirling Castle* before she too sank down into the glutinous Sands. I was the only survivor from the *Mary* and it was a night I will never forget for as long as I live.



**Activity:** First, highlight all the words and phrases which describe the storm, the sinking ships and the sailors in this passage.

Next, draw a sinking ship in a storm. Then label it with all the words and phrases which tell you what's happening. Here's an example to show you.



'The waves were crashing on the Goodwin Sands'



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